DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 441 SP 033 333

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TITLE Teachers as Learners: Accountability and Growth.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (Atlanta, GA, November 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; Case Studies; Elementary Secondary Education; Excellence in Education; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Positive Reinforcement; Quality Control; Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

Accountability is important in today's education. Teachers are expected to maintain high standards of excellence for themselves and their students and to demonstrate professional growth. Though expectations for teachers are usually very similar, expectations of teachers vary enormously. The article highlights certain differences by looking at four imaginary teachers at various points in their careers, considering strengths they bring to the profession and needs they have for continued growth and development. Using a case study approach, the paper examines trends in inservice teacher education and teacher evaluation, noting the effects on teachers. Inservice programs can use teachers' strengths to teach each other. Small, ongoing programs may be more efficient and less expensive than large, one-time meetings. Teacher evaluation deals with accountability and growth, and the relationship between the two is a constant problem. Too often a deficit model forms the basis for inservice and teacher evaluation, with too much focus upon particulars and too little emphasis upon the whole view of teaching and teachers. Accountability should focus on the end result, student learning, and teachers should be able to discover their own ways of engendering learning. Teachers must be held accountable as a profession and as individuals, but new ways to demonstrate that accountability are important. (SM)

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ED337441

TEACHERS AS LEARNERS: ACCOUNTABILITY AND GROWTH

by

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Paper presented at the NCTE Convention
Atlanta, Georgia
November 16-20, 1990

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TEACHERS AS LEARNERS: ACCOUNTABILITY AND GROWTH

In education today, accountability is a fact of life. Teachers are expected to maintain high standards of excellence for themselves and their students. They are also expected to demonstrate professional growth. The myth still persists that teachers coming out of preservice teacher training are somehow "finished", and are expected to take over the responsibilities of an experienced teacher; yet, at the same time they are required to engage in on-going inservice education. In order to ensure that teachers are indeed competent, they are evaluated at regular periods. Rewards are given for various reasons and in various ways. Usually the pay scale is tied to years of experience, with some reward for special administrative responsibilities. In some states, such as Texas, career ladder is based upon performance, length of service, and continued inservice.

While the expectations for teachers are usually quite similar, the expectations of teachers vary enormously, as do their strengths. In order to highlight some of these differences, this article will look at four imaginary teachers at different points in their careers, and consider the strengths they bring to the profession and the needs they have for continued professional growth and development. In a case study approach, trends in inservice education and teacher evaluation, and the effects of these trends upon teachers, will be examined.

Jennifer is a first year teacher, in the internship phase of a five year program. She is 23 years old and unmarried. Her teacher education program at a private university included a major in English, supervised observation in exemplary schools during her junior and senior years, and elementary education courses. Her internship is supervised by her university professor and by a trained mentor teacher who receives released time to work with Jennifer.

SP 033 333

Jennifer's strengths are her intelligence, a well-sequenced preparation program, and on-going support. She is happy and confident in her new position as a fourth grade teacher, and knows that people in the school respect the up-to-date ideas she brings, her idealism, and her enthusiasm, though one or two of the older teachers expect that the enthusiasm and energy will dissipate as the support is removed next year.

Betty, 38 years old, has been teaching seventh grade English at the same school for ten years. She is Department Coordinator, and team leader of a new interdisciplinary teaching team. She is excited about this new project which will involve her in team planning with the science, social studies, and math teachers, and coordination with other specialist teachers. She is grateful for the extra planning period they have been given this year. The theme for this six weeks is Mystery. She wonders how she can incorporate enough skills teaching to enable students to maintain the state test results that the school has shown in the past, but she is willing to try. Her strengths are her experience, her interest in other subject areas, and her leadership skills.

Paul, 47 years old, retired from the military last year, and entered an alternative certification program last summer. He enjoyed the intense training during the summer, and found that his military experience helped him to understand theories of learning. However, this year is tougher than he expected. In addition to teaching five high school ESL classes, with three preparations, he has to attend class two nights a week, and five weekends during the semester. The students do not seem as eager to learn as he hoped, and the discipline is unlike that in the military. His mentor is a young woman who doesn't seem to appreciate his ability to work with people. He is willing to learn, but he is tired! His strengths are his experience with young trainees in the military, and his desire to help students in his classes. Cecilia is a young Hispanic woman, 28 years old, with two young

children. She worked her way through college, and is now in her third year of teaching in the middle school. She identifies closely with the students in this inner city school, and is eager to help them to succeed. She is proud of her heritage, and knows that Hispanics will play an important role in the next century. She wishes that she could take advantage of all the exciting inservice programs that are offered on Saturdays and after school, but she does not have time to attend them. She is afraid that the good ideas she learned in college are getting forgotten as she struggles to keep up with the required syllabus. The teacher evaluation system does not seem to have much to do with what she learned, but she knows she has to play the game and earn good evaluations. She does not know when she will be able to get on the career ladder. Her strengths are her training, her understanding of the young Hispanic students in her classes, and her ambitions for them and for herself.

Teacher Inservice

Educational literature in the past decade has provided much information about the types of teacher inservice that work well for teachers, and that promote teacher growth. Such inservice is related to theories of adult development (e.g. Levine, 1989). We know that adults learn best when they are actively involved in their own learning, when the content and style is related to their interests and felt needs, and when methods involve experiential learning, inquiry, and reflective analysis (Knowles, 1973, Brundage and MacKeracher, 1980). Learning for anyone works best when based upon strengths and interests. For the four teachers in these case studies, these learning principles are not always in place.

Jennifer attended a required inservice on special education at the beginning of the year. She was eager to hear what the speaker had to say, so that she could deal more easily with the two mainstreamed students in her

class, and she did not understand the negative comments of the teachers who accompanied her. When she got there, however, she was disappointed to find that she knew from her college classes most of what the speaker had to say. There was no opportunity for discussion or questions. Most of the teachers there had brought work to do, or daydreamed through the presentation. When Jennifer asked her mentor about it, she told her that this was simply a state requirement, and that it would be repeated each year.

Betty's school district provides a wide variety of staff development offerings, and Betty can choose from a number of workshops, varying from how to teach Moby Dick to basket weaving and aerobics. Betty selects a workshop in interdisciplinary teaching which she finds very valuable, but when she asks about a follow-up session, the instructor says that she was only hired for the one day. Betty is disappointed. She could use an on-going course to provide support and answers to questions throughout this year. She decides to talk to the staff development coordinator, or at least to find out which other district schools are engaged in team planning and interdisciplinary curriculum. Perhaps she could get someone to watch her class so that she could visit another school. It seems that the school district should provide this sort of training!

Paul has been required to attend an after-school inservice program on drug education. While he realizes that it is important, this subject was covered quite fully in one of his courses during the summer. Paul feels overwhelmed. Wednesday is the day he tries to catch up with grading and preparation, since he attends class on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and Monday is faculty meeting. He asks his principal if he can be excused. "That's the trouble with you alternative certification people," says the principal. "You want everything easy for you. Just because you've been in the military doesn't mean you know everything about schools, you know." When

Paul complains to his mentor, she suggests that he bring his grading to the inservice.

Cecilia looks longingly at the poster on the staffroom noticeboard. A full-day workshop with a naationally renowned educator, sponsored by the local reading association! How she would love to go! But there is no child care provided, and her husband is working on Saturday. She wonders if her mother would mind the children again. "I wish that the school district would realize that many of us have little children," she sighs.

It is not easy to provide appropriate inservice programs to build upon the strengths and meet the felt needs of teachers. But it is not easy to provide appropriate education to build on the strengths and meet the needs of students either, and yet that is what good teachers try to do every day. Inservice programs can use the strengths of teachers to teach each other. All teachers are, to some extent, experts in their own classrooms. Opportunities for teachers to meet, reflect upon, and refine their strengths and expertise can enrich a department, a team, or a whole school.

Small scale, ongoing programs may be organized more efficiently and cheaply than hiring an expensive consultant to address large numbers of teachers in a one day meeting. Consultant money may be better used to provide intensive long-term training for a cadre of teachers who can then become consultants and teacher educators for other teachers.

There need not be a dichotomy between what teachers want and what the inservice programs provide. Child care, varied scheduling patterns, imaginative use of team teaching, substitutes and aides to release small numbers of teachers for particular projects, and thoughtful administrative support can enrich teachers' professional lives without over-complicating them.

Teacher Evaluation

It is October, and the teachers are getting anxious. The first teacher evaluation visits are being scheduled, and there are rumors that the system has been changed. The last few years, the observers focussed upon what the teachers were doing. Most teachers learned how to present lessons so that they would get good evaluations. But this year, the rumor has it, the observers are looking at the children, and judging the teacher's performance by what the children are doing. How unpredictable! And to think that the career ladder promotions depend upon the vagaries of a bunch of sixth graders!

Jennifer wonders what all the fuss is about. She has been observed so many times in the past three years that sometimes she is surprised when there isn't an observer in her room! She has been told that the observer is there to help her, and she has learned so much from all her observers. They have not told her much. Instead, they have encouraged her to look at her own teaching and analyze it. This is something she enjoys. "Why do teachers fear this?" she wonders.

Betty is worried. She has always got good evaluations, but she is never sure what the observer is looking for. One time, she had a pre-conference with her principal, and enjoyed the opportunity to talk with her about her classroom and what she was trying to do with the students, but recently there has been no time for pre-conferences, or even feedback conferences afterwards. Last time she received the evaluation form in her mailbox, she made an appointment with the principal to talk about it, but the principal made it clear that she thought Betty was wasting their time. "You got a good evaluation," she told Betty. "What's the problem?" Betty hopes that the observer will understand what they are trying to do with the interdisciplinary program, but she is not sure. It seems as if the evaluation system tries to look for weaknesses so that teachers can be blamed.

Paul is not really worried. He knows that evaluation is a game. "All you have to do is to figure out the rules," he tells his mentor. He does wonder what will happen with his sixth period class, though. They are so unpredictable. He is confident that the observer will take that into account. His mentor doesn't seem so sure.

Cecilia has attended a meeting that her principal held with all the teachers last week. There he explained the new regulations in the state appraisal system. He assured them that they would have nothing to fear. "I know my teachers," he said proudly. "I know that you are doing great things for our students. I know your strengths, and I know that you will show them as well as you can during your observation. And I want to talk to each of you after your observation. It may mean that the observations will go on till Thanksgiving, but I want each of you to know that you are important to this school." Cecilia still is nervous about the upcoming observation, but she knows that her principal will be understanding.

Teacher evaluation serves two main purposes, accountability and teacher growth. The relationship between these two purposes is a constant problem. In Stanley and Popham's Teacher evaluation: Six prescriptions for success (ASCD, 1988), six of the nation's leaders in the field of teacher evaluation struggle with this dilemma, and none of them come to any conclusion that is totally acceptable to the practitioners who respond to them. Perhaps there is too great a focus upon particulars, and too little emphasis upon the whole view of teaching and the teacher. Teachers have strengths, just as children have strengths. Good teachers build on these strengths, and become better. Poor teachers often are not able to perceive their strengths, and concentrate too heavily on trying to eradicate their weaknesses. Certainly, teachers must be held accountable. But accountability should focus on the end result, the learning of children, and all teachers should be encouraged to

discover their own ways of engendering that learning. Too often, teachers spend their energies trying to meet the demands of a specific accountability system, and lose their creativity and personal style in the process. And evaluators are so busy looking for specific behaviors that supposedly determine good t ching that they lose sight of the many ways in which a teacher can enable children to learn.

Reward Systems

Rewards for teachers are both extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic rewards include merit pay, career ladders, special bonuses, usually for administrative or other responsibilities, awards, and other recognition. Intrinsic rewards are more common. They come from the realization that students are learning, from the respect of one's peers, from an awareness that one is continuing to learn new ways to help children, from comments of parents, and so on. Interestingly, most of the literature on teacher evaluation makes no mention of reward. As in staff development and teacher evaluation, the emphasis is on a deficit model rather than on teacher strengths. Yet teachers, like most of the population, respond better to recognition and reward than to criticism and censure. No one enjoys feeling inadequate, yet teachers are frequently put in such a situation.

Jennifer was feeling good. One of her students who had had a really difficult time with reading suddenly seemed to have developed a hunger for books. The whole class was engaged in writing books, and seemed to be enjoying it. And her mentor said that she showed real promise! Jennifer bounced into the faculty lounge. "Look what Jeff wrote in his journal," she bubbled. "He went to the library last night and took out four books, And he has already read one of them." The rest of the faculty seemed unimpressed. "That's nice," said one veteran. "If I know that family, though, those books

will never get back to the library." Another teacher smiled. "Isn't it nice to see the enthusiasm of youth?" she remarked. "Just wait a few years. You will get as realistic as the rest of us." Jennifer felt deflated. What would make these teachers feel good about themselves, she wondered. And why did they resent her joy and sense of achievement? She hoped that she would never stop rejoicing in the learning of her students.

Betty looked again at the form she had received in her mailbox. "Please nominate one of the faculty in your department for district teacher of the year," it said. Betty wondered if it was worth it. The last three years she had spent a great deal of time on developing a strong nomination for one of her teachers. But the award always seem to go to other schools. She wondered why. "Why can't we have awards for teachers in all the schools," she wondered, "and for different things? Maybe we could give a prize to the teacher who finally got Joe Brown to stay in school for more than a week at a time. Or to the teacher who helped Suzy Melton to write that winning essay for a national competition. Why do we honor so few teachers? In my husband's firm, they are always giving different awards and recognitions."

Paul looked at his mentor. "What makes you stay in teaching?" he asked her. "It can't be the pay. We can barely get by and I have my military retirement to help. And teaching certainly isn't much fun, not with all these students who couldn't care less if they learned anything." Judy Franklin looked at him thoughtfully. "I don't really know," she said slowly. "I think it's the little things. The look in a student's eyes when he finally understands what the book is about. The smile on a parent's face when her daughter finally gets a passing grade. The laughter of a class when they appreciate one of my corny jokes. I guess I'm a showman. I like to make a difference to people. That's my reward." Paul shook his head. "It seems there should be more," he said. "In the military, we seemed to have more

celebrations than we have here. Don't you think that would be a good idea?" Judy Franklin sighed and shrugged her shoulders. "When would we ever have time for something like that?" she said. "We don't even have time for all the things we have to do."

Cecilia was feeling really bad. Michael had run away from home again, and the social worker seemed to think it was her fault. "He responds so badly to poor grades," she told Cecilia. "What am I supposed to do?" wondered Cecilia. "Michael hasn't turned in his homework for weeks. I've really tried to help him, but he just won't help himself." She found herself apologizing to the social worker again. Later she felt angry. "Why do I have to feel guilty?" she stormed to her husband. "Well," he said, "You share the kids' successes. I suppose you also have to share their failures." "But I try so hard," cried Cecilia. "Why don't we get rewarded for that?" "I guess life is just unfair," he responded sadly.

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1988) examined Maslow's theory of motivation with respect to what they termed teacher participation and teacher performance. Some teachers, they said, seem to operate at a "participation" level, giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, but reluctant to give any more in terms of time or service. Others operate at a "performance" level, giving far more than is required in terms of effort and time. These are the ones who chaperone dances, sit on committees, develop curriculum, and do the myriads of extra jobs that crop up in the teaching profession. Sergiovanni and Starratt suggest that the first group, those working at the participation level, seek lower order rewards or are motivated by lower order needs such as security, social needs, and some esteem. Those at the performance level, on the other hand, are motivated by higher order needs for esteem, autonomy, and self-fulfilment.

This theory may help to explain why teachers are so willing to go on working so hard for so little extrinsic reward. Although most people would welcome a raise, perhaps this is not a major motivation for teachers. If it were, it is likely that many of them would find themselves in other professions. However, while this theory may help to explain the current state of affairs, it does not excuse it. Teachers, too, need recognition, rewards, and celebrations. If indeed the major motivation for teachers lies in higher order needs, then these needs must be recognized and at least celebrated, if not rewarded in material ways. Successful schools provide such celebration. Teachers are recognized at school board meetings, PTA meetings, and faculty meetings. Along with the celebration of student successes is the celebration of teacher successes, in and out of the classroom.

At the same time, it is important that the profession makes a point of recognizing the strengths of its teachers. Some months ago, a television program celebrated the successes of some very special teachers. It was one of the first of its kind, and the night after its airing, a class of graduate students were asked how they had enjoyed it. One of them raised an important point. "I was glad they showed these good teachers," she said, "but they missed a wonderful opportunity. At the end, they said, 'Tonight we have seen some wonderful teachers. Other teachers could be like them'. Why," asked the graduate student, "couldn't they have said, 'In your community there are teachers like these. Go and look for them'".

Too often a deficit model forms the basis for inservice and teacher evaluation. Teachers are judged on what they cannot do instead of what they are doing. Teacher evaluation systems tend to look for weaknesses. Staff development programs try to remediate those weaknesses . Teachers are blamed for their weaknesses instead being rewarded for their successes. Yet schools are full of quiet successes. Children learn to read, to calculate, to write,

to think. Adolescents learn to come to grips with the complexity of human society. Teachers build communities in their classrooms. Wise and experienced professionals willingly share their expertise with their colleagues.

As a profession and as individuals, teachers must be held accountable, but new ways must be found to demonstrate that accountability. It is not enough to rely on simplistic tests and standardized measures. The richness and diversity of the world of the teacher must be celebrated and valued and proclaimed. Inservice education must be taked seriously as life-long professional growth. Teacher evaluation must recognize and honor the diversity and uniqueness of each situation, and reward the expertise of teachers as they enable individuals to learn in these situations. Teachers like Jennifer, Betty, Paul, and Cecilia deserve the best that the profession can give them.

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February 19, 1992